

Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (Syro-Malabar). The first religious community for women in the SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH, founded in 1866 by Bl. Cyriac Elias Chavara at Koonammavu, Kerala. Rev. Fr. Leopold OCD, an Italian missionary and the delegate of the DISCALCED CARMELITES collaborated in the foundation. After the death of Bl. Chavara in 1871, Fr. Leopold directed the community until his transfer from India. In the beginning, the institute admitted members belonging to both Syro-Malabar and Latin Churches. The community was divided into Oriental and Latin groups, following the ritual separation in 1887 of the Catholics under the Archdiocese of Varapuzha. The Oriental group had to face a number of difficulties during the following years until Aloysius Pazheparambil became director of the convents and, in 1896, vicar apostolic of Ernakulam. He strengthened the organization, provided it with a written constitution, and helped in the establishment of many convents. The Congregation continued as independent diocesan communities in various Syro-Malabar dioceses until 1963, when all were united into one Papal Congregation with one superior general residing at the Mt. Carmel Generalate in Aluva.

At that time, the original rules, modeled on those of the Italian Carmelite Sisters of the Third Order Regular, were radically revised and the name of the community changed from the Third Order of Carmelites. The rules underwent further revision in the light of Vatican II and the 1990 *CODE OF CANONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES*.

Members of the Congregation take simple perpetual vows and wear a brown or white habit, scapular and veil.

CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

Carmelite spirituality is rooted in the Vita Apostolica movement of the 12th and 13th centuries and flowers with a particular brilliance in the 16th-century Spanish Reformation, 17th-century France and again in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Traditionally Carmelite spirituality has focused very narrowly, interpreting its experience through the writings of the two great mystical Carmelite Doctors of the Church, saints Teresa of Jesus (TERESA OF AVILA) and JOHN OF THE CROSS. Scholarship has extended the field in two directions. There has been a serious study of the medieval tradition preceding the two Spanish mystics, a study which has not only shown the Carmelite roots of the two great Doctors but which can stand on its own as a valued mystical tradition. There has also been a serious theological reevaluation of the works of Thérèse of Lisieux, a 19th-century French Carmelite named Doctor of the Church in 1997, a reevaluation that has moved her teaching from popular piety to serious mystical theology. Other contemporary Carmelite writers, most notably St. Edith (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) Stein, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Blessed Titus Brandsma, have added to the substance of this rich tradition.

Origins: The Primitive Carmelite Spirit. The Carmelites must be located in the context of the lay hermit movements that arose in Europe during the late 12th and early 13th centuries. These movements, typified by the disciples of Francis of Assisi and by the various hermit groups of central Italy that were united in 1256 to form the Augustinian Hermits, were a product of the great

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destroyed the military forces of the Latins, who were driven back to a strip of coastland, eventually extending from Tyre to Jaffa. Latin clergy and religious took refuge in Acre, which the Third Crusade restored to Latin hands (1191). The only site suitable for the eremitical life left in the Holy Land was Mount Carmel, and in the 13th century pilgrim accounts and chronicles begin to mention Latin hermits at the fountain of Elijah in the wadi ‘ain es-siah, a narrow valley opening into the sea on the western flank of Mount Carmel at the Bay of Haifa. These hermits were no doubt, partially at least, refugees from the other eremitical sites in Palestine. They received a rule, or *formula vitae*, from Albert, patriarch of Jerusalem, during the years he lived in the Holy Land, 1206–14. The date of origin of the order, long the subject of acrimonious debate, can thus be determined with relative accuracy as occurring 1192–1214.

The rule of St. Albert, a medieval rule that has been little noticed by historians, shows the Carmelites leading an eremitical life and practicing perpetual abstinence, fasts, and silence. In the midst of the cells stood an oratory where the religious assisted at daily Mass “when this can conveniently be done.” Those who could read recited the psalms that “the institutions of the holy fathers and the approved custom of the Church assigned to each hour.”

The hermits dwelling on Mount Carmel had a particularly keen sense of the continuity of monasticism with the way of life of Elijah and of others of the Old Testament. The statement prefixed to the constitutions of 1281 may be taken to reflect the viewpoint of the primitive Carmelites: “From the time when the prophets Elias and Eliseus dwelt devoutly on Mount Carmel, holy fathers both of the old and new testament . . . lived praisewor-